

The Legacy of the Transcontinental Railroad

A Facilitated Dialogue with Maxine Hong Kingston, Michael Solorio, and Dr. Sue Fawn Chung

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Interviewer: Dr. Laura Dominguez

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Abstract: In this facilitated dialogue, Maxine Hong Kingston and Michael Solorio, both descendants of Chinese railroad workers, and Dr. Sue Fawn Chung, a historian of Chinese-American history, discuss the history and legacy of Chinese railroad workers who helped construct the U.S. Transcontinental Railroad between 1863 and 1869. Conducted by historian Dr. Laura Dominguez, the conversation brings together personal and scholarly perspectives on migration, labor, and memory within Chinese American communities. Kingston describes her grandfather's migration from southern China to California to work on the Central Pacific Railroad and reflects on family stories, heirlooms, and oral traditions that shape her understanding of his life and legacy. Solorio recounts the experiences of his great-great-great-grandfather, Lim Lip Hong, who worked as a crew leader on the railroad and later settled in San Francisco. He describes Lim's cross-cultural marriage to a Native American woman, his leadership roles, and the family's later involvement in community advocacy in Chinatown. Dr. Chung provides historical context on group migration, working conditions, the 1867 Chinese railroad workers' strike, and post-railroad discrimination, including the effects of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. The interview also explores Chinese workers' relationships with Native Americans, their adaptation to life in the American West, and the continuation of family and community ties across the Pacific.

Shorter Abstract: In this facilitated dialogue, Maxine Hong Kingston and Michael Solorio, both descendants of Chinese railroad workers, and Dr. Sue Fawn Chung, a historian of Chinese-American history, discuss the history and legacy of Chinese railroad workers who built the U.S. Transcontinental Railroad (1863–1869). Conducted by historian Dr. Laura Dominguez, the interview examines the migration of Chinese laborers from southern China, their working conditions and community networks, and the effects of exclusionary laws and racial discrimination. Kingston and Solorio recount family histories, heirlooms, and oral traditions that illuminate the lived experiences of their ancestors. Dr. Chung provides historical context on group labor systems, the 1867 workers' strike, and Chinese contributions to U.S. economic development. The conversation concludes with reflections on interethnic relations, memory, and the significance of Chinese railroad workers in shaping national identity and American history.

Dr. Laura Dominguez: Hello everyone, and welcome to our recorded program, The Legacy of the Transcontinental Railroad. My name is Dr. Laura Dominguez, and I have the pleasure of serving as an NPS Mellon Humanities postdoctoral fellow. Our conversation today brings together scholars and descendants to reflect on the history and enduring meanings of the first U.S. Transcontinental Railroad. If you're new to this history, the Transcontinental Railroad was built between Council Bluffs, Iowa and Sacramento, California from 1863 to 1869. A majority-immigrant workforce constructed the line as employees of Central Pacific and Union Pacific Railroad companies. As

many as 20,000 of those workers were Chinese. The railroad also passed through the sovereign lands of more than 95 federally recognized Native American tribes. It changed the way Americans imagined and moved through the nation, and it continues to shape experiences of the North American West. It is my honor to moderate a conversation with three remarkable individuals whose work and family stories help us better understand the entangled history of the Transcontinental Railroad and the ways that our memories of it have changed over time. Maxine Hong Kingston and Michael Solorio are both descendants of Chinese railroad workers whose ancestors left southern China to participate in one of the most consequential diasporas in world history. They are joined by Dr. Sue Fawn Chung, a historian of Chinese America and professor emerita at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Together our speakers will braid historical evidence with inherited knowledge of the lived experiences of Chinese railroad workers. We are fortunate to have rich documentation of the building of the railroad, yet the record is often silent on what it meant to the people who built it. The memories of descendant communities play an invaluable role in helping us unpack the human stories at the heart of the Transcontinental Railroad and its legacy. It is an exciting opportunity for us to listen to these different ways of knowing and remembering, to sit side by side with one another. So with that, I invite Maxine and Michael to tell us a little bit about themselves and what brings them to our conversation today. And so Maxine, why don't we begin with you?

Maxine Hong Kingston: I'm Maxine Hong Kingston. My Chinese name is Ting Ting, and I am a descendant of a long line of world travelers—and they would go everywhere. But then my grandfather saw a recruiting poster. The railroads, or the [the Charles] Crocker in California, had recruiting posters all over the Pearl River Delta asking people to come and build a railroad. So my grandfather answered that call. After the railroads, he went back to China. And then the next generation, which is my father, he came stowing away on a boat to Cuba—and getting caught two times, and making it on the third time on the very day that Lindbergh landed in Paris [on May 21, 1927]. And so my father identified with that, that we did it, we got there. So then I'm born in California, and in some ways I'm a birthright citizen, but in another way—people have been coming, my ancestors have been coming to the Americas for generations, but they always went back. So somehow that Americanness didn't quite count until it came to me. And I'm the first one to stay here. Everybody else went back.

Michael Solorio: Thank you Maxine, thanks for sharing all that. My name is Michael Solorio. I was originally born and raised in Santa Ana in Southern California. And I'm here to represent my ancestor Lim Lip Hong. I'm really grateful for my grandma, and my mom, and a lot of people like Dr. Sue Fawn Chung, who's here, and Dr. Gordon Chang who have done a lot of research to help us really put together all the details of the story of my ancestor, Lim Lip Hong, who's a Chinese railroad worker. And I'm also half Mexican, so on my dad's side, I'm Mexican. I'm Mexican-Chinese-American.

Dr. Laura Dominguez: We've already begun to sort of do this a bit, but I'm wondering if you can sketch a brief portrait, each of you, of your ancestor for us. Tell us a little bit more about who he was, where he was born, and your relationship. How did you first come to learn about him?

Michael Solorio: So Lim Lip Hong, my great-great-great grandfather, he was born in 1843 in China, and he came over when he was about twelve years old to the United States. And he first was a cabin boy, and then later became a Chinese railroad worker as a crew head on the Transcontinental Railroad. And he lived and stayed in the United States until he died in 1920.

Maxine Hong Kingston: Well, here is the only picture I have of the grandfather who worked on the railroads. His name, written underneath his picture, it says Yong Fong Yu. That's not entirely his name. It doesn't have his last name, which is Hong, like me. And that's our Siyi [Szeyup in Cantonese] dialect. This word is Yong, and so it says Yong Fong Yu. It's the word for old man, and

it's an honor to be called an old man. He's an ancestor. My father wrote this, and he wrote it in such a wonderful way. He used this word, old man, to describe his father. It's an honor and sort of a forgiveness, I guess, because the reputation of my grandfather was [that] he was crazy.¹ He was totally nuts, and he was not a hero in any way. After the railroads, he returned to China as a failure. They just saw him as a failure. He didn't do anything, he didn't bring anything good back.² One of his crazinesses was that he and my grandmother, they had all boys, and he wanted a girl. And so he took my father, a baby just born, and he went and traded it for a girl. And then, of course, my grandmother got really mad and made him trade back. But all this time he was considered nuts. But then I looked back at the few things I inherit[ed]. I just see that he did win some wonderful things. He had a pair of shoes, western leather shoes, and they were so precious that he wouldn't wear them. He would just hold them so that he wouldn't wear them out. So that's one thing he brought back. And then, just recently I took a good look at this picture, and notice he's wearing an overcoat, a western overcoat. Expensive. And he's got a necktie, he's got a shirt. So there he was, he earned enough to dress like a westerner, and with those shoes in his hand. One valuable thing he brought back was this ring, a gold ring. It's a very soft metal.³ So maybe he found gold in those Sierras, and he made it into a ring, and etched on this ring is two hands shaking, like the Transcontinental Railroad meeting. So he did bring back something of economic value. So one thing that my parents have said about this grandfather—along with his nuttiness—because of his travels and leaving for America, and who knows where else he wandered, but they say that my father never met my grandfather. They were never at the same place at the same time. My father was also traveling all over the place. Cuba, New York, everywhere. So in some ways this man was very mysterious to me. He was alive at the same time I was, but I was a little kid and I didn't hear much about him, except that he was nuts.

Michael Solorio: Thanks for sharing all that, and I love that you shared your ring!

Maxine Hong Kingston: Yes, isn't it amazing?

Michael Solorio: Yeah. Should I show, maybe I could show the stuff that I got from—

Maxine Hong Kingston: Our treasures.

Michael Solorio: Right. My uncle gave me this just a couple months ago. He said, "Hey, Michael, I have a couple of things from your ancestor, from Lim Lip Hong. Do you want them?" I said, "Yeah, of course I want them." It's a tobacco pipe. It's made out of really hard metal. I've never seen a pipe like this before, and it has little etchings of Chinese characters right here. We're able to translate some of them, but not all of them. We know some of the characters mean gold, money, day, SF [San Francisco] maybe. We don't really know exactly what's on here. So yeah, I have this nice Chinese tobacco [water] pipe, and then also that belonged to my great-great-grandfather, an incense holder. This one I'm more willing to use. I'm down to try using this one. Put some incense in there. This one I'm more intimidated to use because I don't want to get it all gunky or ruin it a little bit, but it's nice to have.

Dr. Laura Dominguez: You've assembled this sort of archive for us just here on the screen and I love it. Part of what I love is that we just have these traces and these stories that we're piecing together—these items, these tangible touch points that we are piecing together. I think we're alluding to this already, there's a lot that we know and a lot that we sort of suppose and piece together. And I'm imagining that the early parts of their lives are probably the parts that are most

¹ In China, referring to someone as “crazy” meant that they were “jokesters or happy-go-lucky” types.

² Some 19th-century Chinese migrants claimed poverty as a way of preventing theft, avoiding jealousy, or managing expectations when they returned home.

³ It is likely 24-karat gold, which the Chinese frequently used.

difficult to reconstruct. But I'm wondering if there are any stories or any thoughts that you have on what their lives were like before they immigrated to the U.S., and what that journey might have been like for them.

Michael Solorio: What my grandmother tells me is that Lim Lip Hong's life in China was really rough. Hui Long Lo [in Kaiping County, Guangdong] was the name of the little village that they came from, and they had to deal with really intense poverty because of the Opium War with the British, and also because of conflict between different Chinese communities, or different Chinese [ethnic] groups in the area. So there was famine, and that's why despite them growing their vegetables and growing their rice on their land, they were still not able to have enough money, food, or resources to live very comfortably. And for that reason, pretty much all of the men in the village had to leave, and they left to different places. Lim Lip Hong, being the oldest son of the house, had to take like a man-of-the-house kind of role and that's why he left, went to California. But the other men of the villages likely went to different places from around the world to find jobs to send money back home, so that the family that does stay in the village, that they can at least afford to eat. Do you know about your family in China before they came?

Maxine Hong Kingston: I think very similar to yours. There must have been—just around that time, there must've been horrible famine, because that's the motive for their leaving at all. And it was a very difficult life. I mean, they were farming, but things were not growing. People talked about, they talked about... Oh, I had one cousin who talked about the only thing that grew was pumpkins, and they ate so many pumpkins that they turned orange.

Michael Solorio: No way.

Maxine Hong Kingston: [Chuckles] Yeah. And so, my grandfather had three brothers. There were four men in that family, and all of them left at once. But my grandfather, he was the oldest and he went back. I got to meet my uncles. They were in Stockton [California] and it was just— I just love meeting them. I think of them as my grandfathers because I didn't see my actual grandfather, but I had these great uncles. And they had horses, and I remember very clearly going to the barn and seeing the black horses. It was so beautiful and amazing and I love the sound of the horses going. I mean, they were so inspiring, I got some poems out of that. You know, all of these people, somehow when we talk about famine or we talk about a train, it seems so real. But they were magical. I mean, you're showing me this incense holder. That's a sacred object. That belongs on an altar. When the great uncles died in Stockton, my mother saw their ghosts.

Michael Solorio: [Gasp]

Maxine Hong Kingston: And they came, they were all... they came back—

Michael Solorio: No way.

Maxine Hong Kingston: —and they're still here. This grandfather's wife, my grandmother, from China, she sent us candy, and I don't mean by the mail. We kids would be playing, and then we'd say, "Hey, are you tasting that?" I said, "Yeah, I got some candy in my mouth." And then my mother said, "Well, your grandma just sent it." All those people, they are far away in geography and in time, but somehow they communicate with us.

Dr. Laura Dominguez: Speaking of intimate communities that cross oceans, that cross, transcend time, I'm wondering if you know if your ancestors were able to reunite with family or friends from their home villages once they arrived in the U.S.? How they held those kinds of bonds during their early years?

Michael Solorio: I don't think that he was necessarily able to meet with his family from his same village, except for maybe one person who's also in a few pictures with him. We suspect he might be like a cousin or an uncle of Lim Lip Hong, but he might just be a really close friend. From the pictures that they are together, we could tell that they worked a lot together, and that their relationship was very tight. And besides that, Lim Lip Hong just lived in the community with other Chinese immigrants, people from other backgrounds here in the U.S. And he would write letters to communicate with the people back home, and send money back home.

Maxine Hong Kingston: That's so wonderful, the letter writing. What we had was constant communications by letter. My parents, being the few literate people around, they would help write the letters, they would read letters to people. You know, people left China and they never saw the others again, but there was so much communication by mail. When my grandfather, and my great uncles, and my father, when they came... Let's see, my grandfather came in a group with his brothers, and so we had them. The migration kept coming. And what was wonderful in our family was that the villagers—my mother's village and my father's village—people were very close. My parents started out in New York, and then they came to California. And one reason they came to California was that the rest of the village was in California. The Chinatown of Stockton in some ways is a continuation of the villages in China. Some people who were neighbors in China were neighbors here. I have grown up seeing that the group, the community, the hui, the ohana, are vital to the Chinese people I know. I've thought that somehow Chinese have a genius for community. Maybe it's not a genius, it's just a tradition that we are family. I mean, even Michael and I, our families lived down the street from each other in Hawaii, and here we are in the Bay Area, and we do qigong together. And then we've been thinking maybe his great grandpa and my grandpa, maybe they even met on the railroad. So we get together, generation by generation.

Dr. Laura Dominguez: If I can pause with that thought for a moment and turn to Sue Fawn, you can help us kind of contextualize these stories a bit that we're hearing. What do you think these initial stories tell us about the decisions that Chinese migrants made to leave their homes and cross the Pacific Ocean? And if you could say a bit about what their expectations were for this massive journey.

Dr. Sue Fawn Chung: They tended to do group migration, which means they came with relatives or they came with people from the same village or the same areas, the same district. We know this dramatically because there was one family, the Leo clan. They migrated and worked for the Union Pacific in 1870, and they made up 40% of the workers at the Union Pacific in Rock Springs, Wyoming. And we know this because their names were listed during the 1885 massacre of Chinese. Now, in the case of Lim Lip Hong, he traveled by junk—that is a Chinese ship—across the Pacific with relatives. The family didn't have a lot of money. They were very, very poor. And so he traveled with these relatives, and one of them died en route and was buried at sea. And so, you know, who knew back home that this person had died? Because, you know, there's no body or anything. But eventually, someone would tell someone and they would know that so-and-so passed away. We always assume that most of the Chinese who immigrated to the United States were illiterate, but by looking at the poems on Angel Island, and other writings, we see that they actually had some literacy. And when you look at the records that are in San Bruno at the National Archives, you see that some could write [Chinese well] and some could not. So there's a wide variation in what we call literacy. You have to remember that the Chinese considered literacy to be passing the Confucian classics exam, and very few people could do that. But to read a newspaper, that's not literate. You have to define what is literate and what is not. To write a letter, that's not literate. You have to be able to quote the Confucian classics before you're considered literate. As far as moving together, like Maxine said, that was very common, and they tended to try to keep together with friends, relatives, people from the same village, people from the same area. And so you have these cliques

that occur, and they tended to protect each other and work together. And so, for example, some people became butchers and they all tended to come from Foshan, one of the villages or areas in Canton. And we see that working together in the railroads as well, so that Lim Lip Hong often worked with people from the area that he came from. Not necessarily the same village, but from the same area. And for generations, they would be in contact with each other so that fourth generation today still know people who were workers on the railroad with their ancestors.

Dr. Laura Dominguez: Let's start talking about the railroad. Let's pivot to Central Pacific and the experiences of your ancestors doing rail labor. Do you have any sense of the kinds of jobs or the kinds of labor that they performed? Where on the land they were situated? What do you know about their early railroad experiences?

Michael Solorio: My grandma tells me that Lim Lip Hong was part of the first team of Chinese railroad workers that began working on the railroad, from Sacramento going east, right when the mountains start around Dutch Flat, which is kind of close to Lake Tahoe, that's where he started working. And because he knew English, and because he was able to build good relationships with the white bosses—maybe like Crocker, Leland Stanford—he was a crew head, meaning he was kind of like a manager, like a recruiter, and he would help resource the team like with the food. He would help them with their materials, help them map out the work that they would do. And he was riding by horse a lot. He started in Dutch Flat in California, and he worked on the railroad through Nevada and then to Utah until the Golden Spike connected the Union Pacific Railroad and the Central Pacific Railroad, which happened in 1869, I believe. So he worked five years on the Central Pacific Railroad, and then he eventually worked on a bunch of other railroads too. What about you? What kind of work did your grandpa do?

Maxine Hong Kingston: Well, as I said, mind you, he's nuts, so we don't know whether this is true or not. Dynamite was invented right in time to work on the railroads—

Michael Solorio: Right.

Maxine Hong Kingston: —and so it was his job to get lowered down in a basket. They painted lucky words on all sides of the basket, and then he'd get lowered in the basket, and then he'd set the dynamite with a long fuse, and then they light it, and then they hoist him up really fast.

Michael Solorio: Right, they put the dynamite on the side of the mountain, right? In little holes.

Maxine Hong Kingston: Yeah, yeah. And it was one of his things, like he really liked to piss over the basket.⁴ And he liked to masturbate over the basket. And you know what? Okay, this is what I get from the family, but I, as a writer, I find the true meaning of this. He got up there, and he fucked America, and that means that he married America. And that means we belong here and he should not be driven out. Okay, so that's about all I know about that grandfather.

All: [Laughs]

Michael Solorio: Wild.

Dr. Laura Dominguez: Well, that leads into my next question which was, are there any stories or experiences on the railroad that have really stood out to you and your family over time? So I think Maxine has shared on that, but certainly I want to, I want to turn that back to both of you and ask you if you can share a little bit more about just the overall conditions that they endured as part of

⁴ Small acts of rebellion or lightheartedness, like the ones Hong Kieu Fong allegedly performed, helped laborers assert their power while doing dangerous work.

the crew. You've both indicated it was incredibly dangerous, difficult work in very unforgiving environments.

Maxine Hong Kingston: The most wonderful thing that came out of this difficult work is that the Chinese, they united, which they're very good at, uniting one another, and they went on strike. And they had strike conditions. Eight hours a day, good for a white man. All the same, good for China man. Wow! Back in those days, asking for an eight hour day. The strike failed, but I think what a wonderful legacy to have left for workers' rights.

Michael Solorio: Right? It was the first strike that happened in the United States, right, Sue Fawn Chung?

Dr. Sue Fawn Chung: No, it wasn't, but it was a major strike and it made an impact, because there were 2,000 men and it was a peaceful strike, so they didn't fight, or have any arguments or anything. It also stood as a model for a lot of future strikes, including the 1877 Great American Railroad strike that will come later. They will look back at what the Chinese did in 1867 for this strike. And they actually did get some of the demands for better working conditions, and better time, and a little higher wage. But what happened was they didn't want Charles Crocker to lose face,⁵ so they said, okay, we'll go back to work, and we'll take the conditions that you say. And then a month later, they got several of their conditions that they wanted. They got a higher salary. They got ten-hour workday, and safer working conditions. But of course that wasn't publicized in the newspaper. Only their failure in the strike was publicized.

Maxine Hong Kingston: I am so glad to know that there were some victories, but you know what? You were talking about the awful conditions. There were some wonderful conditions. They were well supported by the Chinese and the Chinatown of San Francisco. I mean, they would bring up good food. They would bring up good tea. Also, they would bring opera troupes.

Michael Solorio: Wow.

Maxine Hong Kingston: And so they had shows, they had dancing, they had music. So there was a civilization that they formed there. I saw a picture. It was in one of those old Chinatowns, or maybe it even was on the railroad. It was New Year's, and they had taken all these rags and old clothes and they sewed together a dragon. And you could see their feet underneath and they're dancing. So there were some good times at the railroad.

Michael Solorio: I remember reading that for the poor Chinese immigrants, for some of them, it was the first time they were able to consistently eat chicken, eat meat, instead of vegetables and maybe chicken barely every once in a while [in China]. So they were able to eat better compared to back home. They were able to enjoy tea with each other, which contrasts with the extremely rough conditions. Some of the hardest winters ever endured. They had to stay in tents. I remember people say that some workers would freeze and get lost in the snow and then they wouldn't be found until all the snow melts away, in spring [of 1867]. You'd find frozen dead bodies. I actually recently visited the Summit Tunnels just a month ago. I saw the entrance, I saw the China Wall, which Lim Lip Hong might have worked on too. And it was interesting because it was honestly beautiful. Like it had just snowed, and you could see the snow on the trees. There were a bunch of families pushing their kids around on sleds, having a good time. So I was having like this little walk through the snow, which contrasts a lot with like—I was pretty warm in all my jackets, but imagining just the basic fabrics they had back then, and being out there for months at a time instead of just like a couple of hours that I did. It was interesting to see the beauty of the snow and the landscape, but also like its deadliness. If you slip and slip down the hill, you might never get found again and

⁵ Losing face is a Chinese concept of honor.

never be able to get up, so you get frozen. If you're working with dynamite, you could get blown to pieces, and it's even harder to heal yourself in those conditions. One story that I really appreciated hearing about how the Native Americans helped the Chinese railroad workers survive and understand how to make use in the land and live in harmony with the land in order to make it through. Because a lot more Chinese railroad workers probably would have died if it weren't for the Native Americans teaching them how to be in good relations with the land. How to survive better.

Maxine Hong Kingston: Oh, that's just wonderful to know that people could be good to each other like that. I heard a story about the tea. Tea is something honorary that we give to one another. And they had tea. And even if they didn't have tea, hot water was very important, and they would drink hot water even when it was hot outside. Their idea was that somehow hot water can keep you well even when it's hot or it'll cool you down, or something like that. What I heard was, oh, and then the white people were thinking, 'Why are they drinking hot water when it's hot? They should be drinking cold water.' But the hot water was this— It's almost tea. And that's a celebratory thing to give one another. The tea is brought from San Francisco, you know? And so it's the people just bringing good stuff to them.

Michael Solorio: Right, and the tea, drinking tea every night on a regular basis was one of the main contrasts with the Irish workers, right? Or with the workers that were not Chinese rail workers, because they would drink more alcohol, or they would water straight from the river.⁶ And for that reason, Irish workers, white workers who started working on the railroad decided to all quit and leave the job, or left the job more often, at least, because they weren't drinking tea like the Chinese are.

Maxine Hong Kingston: There was a race between the Irish and the Chinese workers. I don't even know what happened, but I just heard that there was such a thing.

Dr. Sue Fawn Chung: There was a race between the Union Pacific and the Central Pacific, and the two heads—Durant on Union Pacific, Crocker on the Central Pacific—said, "Who can lay the most track in one day?" And the Central Pacific won using Chinese and eight Irish supervisors, and Crocker supposedly won the \$10,000 bet. And that feat was never surpassed until modern times, when mechanized equipment would lay the track and build the line. There's a sign that commemorates the building of ten miles in one day that the Chinese did. In 1870, two teams coming from opposite ends laid a lot of miles, but the Chinese, that one ten-mile trip was fantastic, and it was orchestrated so that everything moved at a rhythm. And I don't think it's ever really been surpassed by hand labor.

Maxine Hong Kingston: Did Crocker share the \$10,000?

Dr. Sue Fawn Chung: I don't think so, because Crocker and the whole Central Pacific team were so wealthy. The wealth was just unbelievable, really fantastic. These men were just so wealthy, you can't believe it. He had enough money so that he started his son's bank called Crocker Bank, which today is, I think, Wells Fargo. But it's money being passed through generations.

Dr. Laura Dominguez: I'm sitting here sipping tea with ingredients harvested from the Sierra Nevada, and I'm feeling so grounded to the lands that you're talking about. What a serendipitous choice. There's a lot that I want to give you a chance to expand on, if you'd like, that you've shared about community. The communities that were formed in the mountains; the communities that were formed in relation to San Francisco, Chinatown; the Chinatowns we know would, in the future, begin to appear along the line. The knowledge that was shared among Chinese workers, but also the

⁶ The practice of primarily getting drinking water straight from the river led to high rates of dysentery and other water-borne pathogens. Boiling water for tea killed those pathogens, making the tea safer to drink.

knowledge that was shared across cultural lines. I want to come back to that in a little bit. The science, the medicine, there's just so much there, but to keep us kind of moving, and I want to keep thinking about this. Michael, you said your ancestor worked for Central Pacific until 1869, and then went on to work for another railroad. Do you want to tell us a little about Lim Lip Hong's journey after Central Pacific, and Maxine as well? What did they go on to do after the Golden Spike?

Michael Solorio: So yeah, he worked on the Central Pacific Railroad until 1869, when the Golden Spike joined the Central Pacific Railroad and the Union Pacific Railroad. After that, my grandma says that he worked more on the Union Pacific Railroad to help fix some of the errors, some of little patches that needed to be repaired, which was an interesting time because he was still a crew head, still a leader of a group, but this time for white people. The Union Pacific Railroad had more white workers on it. And so we have a picture of Lim Lip Hong sitting in front of his team, and it's a bunch of white workers, which was really interesting to learn. I only learned about that recently. He worked and led white people like that. So yeah, he worked on the Union Pacific Railroad. After that, we suspect he worked on the Southern Pacific Railroad, which went through Texas and that area. And then he might have even worked on the Northern Pacific Railroad, or just the northern railroads that were around Washington, through the Midwestern states. So yeah, we suspect he worked on railroads pretty much his whole life, and that's what he believed would be his best contribution to the United States.

Maxine Hong Kingston: So he stayed in America after?

Michael Solorio: Yeah, after the Transcontinental Railroad finished, he stayed pretty much his whole life in America until he died in 1920.

Maxine Hong Kingston: Well, my grandfather went back to China. And I don't know what the circumstances are that made him go back, because after the railroad was built, there was driving out. Just throwing them out of the country. There were burnings of Chinatowns, there were lynchings, shootings. Also though, there were jobs. They would take an entire gang of people who worked on the Central Pacific, and send them to another site to build some more railroads. There were quite a lot of those. There was a group that was sent to a shoe factory.⁷ There were jobs where teams of the former railroad workers went. So not all of them were chased out or killed, but I know that my grandfather did not join another team. He was not lynched or anything. So I guess he did make enough money to go back to China, and he probably used all of his money to go back and arrive back home with nothing,⁸ except for his coat, and his tie, and this ring. And probably that's why they saw him as a failure.

Dr. Laura Dominguez: I'm hearing from both of you these two very divergent, but I think representative stories about what happened to so many railroad workers after the Transcontinental Line was done. First, there's that embodied knowledge that's gained while laying the track that's taken to other railroad projects, not just throughout the U.S., but around the world, and the ways in which Chinese railroad workers had a very specific kind of expertise, but also as Maxine is alluding to, faced tremendous violence and discrimination and exclusion. And so, it's just so powerful to hear you both share those stories within the same frame. If we can press a little bit more on their family lives after the railroad or during the railroad as it were, when did they get married? What did their lives with their wives look like, their children? We've talked about it a little, but I'd like to hear more about their family lives if you can.

⁷ This group was sent to a factory in North Adams, Massachusetts in 1870.

⁸ At some point after returning to China, Hong Kieu Fong was bayoneted in the head. Hong Kingston speculates that this injury may have contributed to lasting mental health effects.

Michael Solorio: After joining the Union Pacific and the Central Pacific Railroad, Lim Lip Hong settled for a little bit in Virginia City, Nevada, which was a little bit eastward from where he started, and that's where he started a family with a Native American woman. Her name was Ti Cum. She was from the Miwok tribe. And I feel like their marriage really represents the support that the two communities had for each other, Native Americans and Chinese railroad workers. Because my grandma tells me it was actually, it would happen. It was kind of common for Native Americans and Chinese railroad workers to marry because of the way that they supported each other while the railroad was going on. Like the Native Americans would help teach the Chinese Americans how to survive, fish, live off the land a little bit. And then the Chinese would share with them their opium, which was helpful as a medicine for the body. They probably shared teas and other things like that. So there was a lot of cross-cultural collaboration, which I feel like his marriage to Ti Cum represents. That was in 1868 when he got married with Ti Cum. They had two daughters, so they were Native American and Chinese. And he stayed living with his family in Virginia City for around eight-ish years, because in 1876, the local people—white people who were angry at the Chinese because of anti-Chinese sentiment, because they believed they were taking their jobs and things like that—they burnt down the local Chinatown. And then they forced Lim Lip Hong, all the Chinese out, and they forcefully separated Lim Lip Hong from his Native American family. He was not able to see his wife and his kids until much later.⁹ At the end of his life, towards the end of life, he actually is able to reunite with them. But yeah, he's driven out from Virginia City in 1876, and then he flees to San Francisco. And tenish years later, he has another wife. This one's Chinese, and they go on to have seven children together. And that's kind of a gist of his family life.

Maxine Hong Kingston: What a rich family story you have.

Michael Solorio: Right? I have some cousins out there who are Chinese and Native. [chuckles]

Maxine Hong Kingston: Yeah, that's wonderful. That is so great. Well, in my family villages, it seemed that nobody wanted to leave and leave forever. The idea was that they would go and make their fortune, and come home. Even during the Communist days, I was at the villages, and you know the Communists, they would have this loudspeaker system out into the fields. And they would tell a fairy tale. And the fairy tale would say, go out into the world, my son, and come back with a fortune. You know, find love and a fortune. It's two things. You find love and a fortune. So what my family did was, before you leave for another country, you get married. And so everybody gets fixed up with a marriage, and then you leave, knowing that you will have to come back to be with your wife. Some of them would leave a child, too. Anchors for them to come back. Well, some came back and some did not. I have a grandfather, on my mother's side, he would come back, and every time he came back, he brought a different wife. So he had three of them, and one of them is Nicaraguan. So I have Latin American—.

Michael Solorio: No way.

Maxine Hong Kingston: [chuckles] Latin roots also.

Michael Solorio: Wow.

Maxine Hong Kingston: That wasn't my biological grandma, but she was my third grandma. This grandfather, Ah Gōng, he had a wife and he had kids. One of the kids he traded for a girl, but it didn't work. So he left them all and he came to California. So when he went back, his wife is really mad at him. The reason I only have one picture of him is she kicked him out of all the pictures. So ashamed of him, she didn't want any pictures of him. He was really close to his daughter-in-law, who was my mother, and it's to her that he tells the stories. It's the two of them that were so close

⁹ Ti Cum stayed with her tribe and moved around California with them during this time.

that when it was time for her to leave for America, he walked her to the ferry boat that would take her to Canton, and then get on a ship. And he's crying the whole way. And there's just the two of them saying goodbye. And that time it was forever, and they knew it. And they make me know it too. Always telling me, "We're never gonna see each other again." You know, that was one of the conflicts that went through our family too. There was another great uncle, same generation. So many days thinking, should he go back to China? Should he go back to his wife? Trying to make that decision. It was so hard. And I'm a little kid and I'm listening to all this and I see the grownups in sort of agony about leaving his wife at home. And they ended up not going back to China. He died without seeing them again. So this thing of, am I ever gonna see you again? It just runs through the whole history of my family and some meet again and some don't.

Michael Solorio: Wow.

Dr. Laura Dominguez: You've given us so much richness to think about their lives, and so I'm wondering if there's anything else you could tell us about their biographies, either before or after the railroad. Maybe telling us about organizations or societies they belong to, labor activism that they may have done, but of their larger engagement with their community?

Maxine Hong Kingston: I don't have much to say about that because my grandfather was in so many ways an outsider. He's crazy, so he can't contribute very much. He was close to my mother and she is an amazing storyteller, coming from a long line of storytellers. And so maybe what he did was he gave her inspiration for her stories. And then his son, my father, is a poet. So, he just gives maybe these intangible things which are passed on to me, but as far as real life contributions, financially, politically, it was nothing.

Michael Solorio: It was really the art that was passed down.

Maxine Hong Kingston: Yeah, maybe. Maybe not even that. Maybe good stories about penises.

All: [Laughs]

Michael Solorio: So many.

Maxine Hong Kingston: Which is forbidden. Not very nice to talk about.

Michael Solorio: So many. Definitely not the dinner table.

All: [Laughs]

Maxine Hong Kingston: No, not at the dinner table.

Michael Solorio: My ancestor, Lim Lip Hong, we believe that he was a big community leader in the San Francisco Chinatown, and the greater Chinese-American community there. We believe that he partnered with Li Hui Chung, who was appointed by the Emperor [Guangxu], by the palace of China, to be the general consulate in San Francisco, to support the litigation and the legal things for Chinese immigrants. So that's Li Hui Chung, who's actually also related to me, which I'll explain in a little bit. So we believe that Li Hui Chung partnered with Lim Lip Hong, and together they helped set up a lot of businesses, and helped advocate for Chinese workers, making sure people get paid okay, got treated well. After their connection, after they grew fond of each other business-wise and work-wise, Lim Lip Hong and Li Hui Chung arranged to have their kids marry. So Lim Lip Hong's first son, Lim Sing, married Li Hui Chung's daughter. Another thing that my family did—not necessarily Lim Lip Hong, but his first child, Lim Sing—after the 1906 earthquake and fires, a lot

of Chinatown burnt down, and the leaders in the area, the white leaders, were going to take advantage of that situation and move the Chinatown somewhere else. They wanted to move it way south, out of San Francisco. They said, okay, great, we're finally able to get these Chinese people out of here. My grandma tells me that Lim Sing partnered with Wong Get Yow, who at the time was the richest Chinese person in the area, that they together organized the Chinese community and also advocated against the local leaders in order to keep Chinatown there. So anyway, my grandma says that Lim Sing, my great-great-grandpa, helped to save San Francisco Chinatown. Other things that they did to generally support the community is after the earthquake and fires, the ranch that Lim Lip Hong stayed on in San Francisco, he helped house a lot of the people who lost their homes during the fires and during the earthquakes. The children continued to really be really engaged with the Chinese-American community, to help everyone support each other, make sure the community thrives, especially in a climate and in an environment where there was a lot of anti-Chinese sentiment. So they really had to stick together and support each other to survive. And we believe that my family really believed in that.

Maxine Hong Kingston: I think it's wonderful that a young generation would know your ancestral history. It's great.

Michael Solorio: It's an honor. I'm really grateful my grandma did all that research. Grateful that Sue Fawn did all this research. It's wonderful. It is an honor to know all of this.

Maxine Hong Kingston: One thing about burning City Hall [in 1906], so many people claim that their birth certificate was burned too, and that they really are citizens. And that's how so many of them became Americans.

Michael Solorio: That was one of the ways they were able to get around the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act. They were able to falsely gain their American citizenship.

Dr. Laura Dominguez: I want to turn back to Sue Fawn and ask if you can share a bit about what's standing out to you as you're listening, and maybe kind of help us contextualize with what Chinese railroad workers typically were doing after 1869. Where they were going, the challenges they were facing, and what their lives looked like?

Dr. Sue Fawn Chung: After 1869, many of them continued to work on railroads—intrastate, small lines, big lines. It was really amazing because they had to have enjoyed working on the railroad in order to voluntarily continue to work on them, and to go on to working on other lines. Lim Lip Hong is a prime example of that. He worked on at least four lines that we know of, that we can document. Whether he worked on the other ones, it's a problem with his name more than anything else. But their dream was to have a family and children, and to have these children be successful. And in the case of Lim Lip Hong and Maxine's ancestor, they did give their descendants a headstart and helped them along. In the case of Lim Lip Hong, he had several children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren who went to Stanford [and the University of California, Berkeley]. And I think that was a real accomplishment, I think, for a Chinese American who came from a really impoverished family and a really impoverished village to succeed that much, and that was a big American dream. Not only that, but Lim Lip Hong also sent money back to China. He helped build educational institutions there. There was another man who worked on the railroads who actually built a railroad in China using Chinese-American funds, and it was the second railroad that China had. So there were really big accomplishments. One of the interesting things that both Michael and Maxine said was how their ancestor was connected with horses. There were no horses in Guangdong at the time.¹⁰ They learned about the horses working on the railroad and they came to

¹⁰ While there were horses in Guangdong during the Qing Dynasty, it is unlikely that peasant farmers would have had an opportunity to ride one.

love horses. Both men, or in Maxine's case her grand uncles, loved horses, and I think this all comes from working on the railroad, learning how to take care of them, how to ride them. You see this kind of contribution. One of the other things that happens at this time is that goods go from America into these villages where the Chinese came from. Not only goods, but in the area of Kaiping, where Lim Lip Hong came from, they built watchtowers in a combination of Chinese and American architecture. And even today, when you go to some of the villages in Kaiping, some of the homes look very American because they've continued this American influence of architecture in their home villages, or in their now urban areas, because many of the villages turned into small cities or towns, and then, you know, into bigger cities. So it's really amazing when we think about the exchange of information, of ideas, of products, and so forth that traveled during this time because of the building of the Central Pacific Railroad and the Union Pacific Railroad, making passage from the East Coast, and the central part of America, and the West Coast over to Asia, and from Asia back across the Pacific and all the way over to New York.

Michael Solorio: It was really cool to hear about how China really valued the work of the Chinese railroad workers in the United States. So much that the emperor gave Lim Lip Hong a royal robe to celebrate his accomplishments. So we have some cool pictures of him in this really cool robe with like a pheasant on it.

Dr. Sue Fawn Chung: He was a fifth-rank mandarin, or that's the rank that the emperor granted him, which means that he's an outstanding civilian citizen,¹¹ and he was eligible for various rights and privileges because of that rank on that robe that he could wear out on the street, and everyone would know that he had this special designation.

Michael Solorio: That's one of the physical manifestations of all of his accomplishments and all of this work on the railroad, his contributions to the United States and also China.

Dr. Laura Dominguez: I want to back up a little bit and talk about the relationship between your ancestors and Maxine's ancestors, and their relationships with other groups of people. Michael, you spoke about Lim Lip Hong's relationship with a Native American woman and I'm just wondering, do you know if your ancestors formed meaningful relationships with non-Chinese people while they were here, during that time?

Michael Solorio: So yeah, we know about his relations with the Native American community, through the wife that we mentioned, and the kids he had. And we also believe he hired people of other ethnic backgrounds as well, including Japanese people, Brazilian people, Black people, Mexicans. So there was probably a lot of different people that he worked with. We believe that Lim Lip Hong wanted to collaborate with and support because we feel that his heart was there for people of all backgrounds and really, the people who needed support. But also, he had a lot of good relationships with white people. I mentioned Alfred [L.] Tubbs, who was his first employer, and who taught Lim Lip Hong English. Alfred Tubbs helped connect Lim Lip Hong to a lot of job opportunities, including when he became working on the railroad. And also the relationship between Alfred Tubbs' son and Lim Lip Hong's son, Lim Sing, was also able to happen in the next generation, and help elevate Lim Sing's later business and success in future endeavors with shipping businesses and things like that. So really, in my family I could see that it's because of the cross-community collaborations, and because of these coalitions really that happened between different types of people that enabled their success and their riches, in a way riches. Because as Sue Fawn mentioned earlier, a lot of my family members were able to become college educated in a time where for people of color it was extremely difficult to get to that point. A lot of the success comes from cross-community collaboration.

¹¹ Lim Lip Hong was given a silk embroidered rectangular badge to wear on his robes as a sign of his royal civilian status.

Dr. Laura Dominguez: You've both spoken a little bit about what your ancestors' lives and your family's lives looked like during the exclusion period, and so I want to speak a little bit longer about the anti-Chinese movement in the West. Do you have any sense of the kinds of discrimination or violence that your ancestors encountered and any sense of their response to that period of time?

Maxine Hong Kingston: I have no stories from the grandfather of any discrimination. I didn't even know about the driving them out at the end until I read it in history. You know, my parents would talk about discriminations, but never my grandfather. He seemed to not have come across anything like that.

Michael Solorio: I do have some stories about my ancestor and his family facing the anti-Chinese sentiment. One of the first most harsh experiences for Lim Lip Hong was when they burnt down the Chinatown in Virginia City and forcefully separated him from his Native American wife and daughters. From there he moved to [South] San Francisco and he had a Chinese family there. And then because of Lim Lip Hong's connections with his own community, as well as with people from other communities, he was able to accrue some comfortable wealth so that his family was able to grow up relatively middle class, which again was a rare privilege for Chinese people in those days. Some of his kids were college educated. One brother, Art Lym, was one of the first Chinese Americans to get a pilot license. He was able to fly at the same time-ish as the Wright brothers, a little bit after. So despite that being super rare to have a pilot license at all, he was never able to get a job flying in the United States. So instead, he went back to China and helped China establish their first air force. He worked under Sun Yat-sen. Another brother,¹² this one, his name is [Lym] Fook Wah, he went to college and he studied engineering at UC Berkeley, where I am now actually. I'm studying to be a therapist. But he became an engineer. After he graduated, he also couldn't get a job! Nobody would hire him because he's Chinese. So instead, he became a liquor salesman [in Chinatown]. Those are the main two situations of hiring discrimination that the family faced. Yeah, besides that, you know, there was day-to-day discrimination that they faced. I hear a lot of stories about my family having to walk miles and miles to get to school¹³ because all of the local [public] schools were not willing to educate Chinese kids and things like that.

Dr. Laura Dominguez: Briefly, Sue Fawn, could you tell us a little bit more about how typically nineteenth century immigrants interacted with other groups and what we can kind of learn from those entanglements in their lives? And also, how can we kind of contextualize these experiences of racism and violence? What might we take away from them?

Dr. Sue Fawn Chung: It was a very interesting time period because the Americans were influenced by European pseudoscientific ideas of race. And so they categorized four different races. White as superior because of their brain size [which] was supposed to be bigger, and that's been proven wrong. Then came at the very bottom Chinese, Native Americans, and African American people. So these were the lower levels of society and brain size, and so there was a lot of racism and discrimination based on those false ideas. Then eventually what happens is that the people, especially in California, see that there is a large Chinese population growing at a rapid rate, and they said, "We have to stop these immigrants." It began in 1850, and moved on until the first Chinese Exclusion Act was passed in 1882. The first one limited laborers. The second one in 1892 put all kinds of people in the category of laborers, including ministers, doctors. You name it, they

¹² The wording is ambiguous, but Art Lym and Lym Fook Wah are Lim Lip Hong's sons, not his brothers.

¹³ In addition to not being allowed to attend the local schools, Chinese immigrants and Chinese-Americans were also not allowed to ride on public transportation in San Francisco.

were excluded. The only people that they allowed in were merchants.¹⁴ Now in China, merchants are the fourth level, the lowest class, but now in America, they're the first level. So, you know, what do you do? Do you become a merchant, and become a lower class person in China, but an upper-class person in the United States? Well Lim Lip Hong went, "I'll go the American way and I'll become a merchant." And we see that the racism and discrimination could be very violent. People would die, people were killed. There were massacres throughout the 1880s and 1890s. You would think that with the Exclusion Act, it would stop, but it didn't. And they continued to discriminate against the Chinese, both in social matters, political matters, economic matters. When Michael mentions the job limitations the Chinese Americans faced, that was very common. Education was another one. The UC system, for example, did not like to have Chinese, and so often the private schools like USC would allow Chinese to get an education. And then there was residential segregation, which Lim Lip Hong experienced. He was able to buy property and build homes for his children because of the Tubbs family. It was the Tubbs' land that he was building on. Otherwise, he would not have been.¹⁵ And poor Lim Lip Hong's children had to go two hours in order to get to school in Chinatown, San Francisco's Chinatown, because they lived in South San Francisco, and none of the schools in California would allow Chinese to go to school except in segregated schools, so they went to the little quote-unquote "Oriental school" in downtown Chinatown. That's how they had to get their education. So we see that it had all kinds of permutations, really until the 1960s Civil Rights Movement when things began to open up to the Chinese, and of the end of [the] Exclusion Act in 1943 allowed women to come in and families to exist for the first time instead of having a segregated, enforced bachelor society among Chinese Americans. It was a great change, great transformation. As far as relations with other minority groups, sometimes the minority groups would interact with Chinese positively and sometimes negatively. One of the interesting studies that I helped fund was the similarities between Chinese herbal medicine and Native American herbal medicine with the Chumash in California. You could see that they shared the same kinds of plants, curing the same kind of illnesses, so this was one of the ties. In the case of Ti Cum marrying Lim Lip Hong, she came from Tuolumne, which traditionally had a large Chinese mining population, so her family was aware of who the Chinese were and what they were. And so when she decided to marry Lim Lip Hong, she was in Tuscarora or somewhere in eastern Nevada. She said, "I want to go home and get married." And he took her back to Tuolumne and they got married with the blessing of her family, who knew about Chinese from their experience with earlier Chinese miners. So, you know, it varied greatly, and it was very individualistic. For people to make these generalizations, which they have been making for decades, you have to look and see what exactly was happening. And in the anti-Chinese movement, in many of the cases that I studied, white families would protect their Chinese friends. One man was working on the railroads. He saw a fire start, and he rushed in to save his Chinese friend and burned both his arms, but this is what he wanted to do, and they were forever friends after that. They were friends before, but forever friends after that. So we hear these great stories of friendships and unity, and then we also hear about the horrors of racism and discrimination.

Dr. Laura Dominguez: That's a really beautiful place, I think, to pivot—powerful place, maybe even better word—to pivot into speaking about legacy and memory. Maxine and Michael, you've sort of alluded to this throughout your storytelling, but I'm wondering if you can tell me a little bit about what you think your ancestors' most important legacy is and how your family keeps those traditions, those stories, those connections alive.

¹⁴ The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 also allowed the families of merchants, students, and diplomats to enter the United States. Chinese citizens who were already residents of the United States were allowed to leave and return as long as they either owned property in America or were owed more than \$1,000.

¹⁵ California and other western states passed laws barring Asian immigrants from owning or leasing land. Lim Lip Hong got around these restrictions by building on land owned by the Tubbs family or by putting the property in the name of his American-born children, especially Lim Sing.

Michael Solorio: So I feel like the legacy of Lim Lip Hong, him being a Chinese railroad worker and him connecting the United States through the Transcontinental Railroad, for me, really, one of the biggest messages it's always given me has been that my great-great-great grandfather was a very important part of the heart of the United States, as he really helped create the arteries and the veins that created the United States into a healthy, into a strong body that it became, that it is still growing into. So I feel, learning about his story really makes me feel at home here. Lim Lip Hong, his kids, his descendants, they've all contributed a lot in so many communities here. They've helped establish the foundations of life for a lot of communities. I feel really at home here. And also, as I mentioned a little bit earlier, the fact that Lim Lip Hong was so involved in so many different coalitions between people of different backgrounds, with Native Americans, with Black people, with Brown people, for me it shows me that to be successful and to do new things and to do things strongly, collaboration between different types of people is what will make you have a better chance of success in your work. My family, we remember his legacy by passing down his story. Popo, my grandma, started telling me this story when I was maybe twelve years old, and then just slowly as the years went on, told me more and more and more, until four-ish years ago, I knew enough so that I would start to help her make PowerPoints and we would present together at history museums, or at places that invited us to speak. We pretty much make sure that every person in our family knows the story of Lim Lip Hong to help them feel grounded and also see the value of connecting with people of all types.

Maxine Hong Kingston: I feel that the legacy that Hong Fong Yu left me is that it's all right to be a sensitive, crazy, outside kind of person, and that it is okay to be the way that I am, also sensitive and crazy. And he was different from other people of his time. Everybody valued boys, and congratulates everybody if they have a boy, and if it's a girl, well you could drown her. You could sell her as a slave. And from the moment I heard about it, that he took a baby boy and traded it for a girl, I thought, wow, that's it. That's what... His love for girls comes down to me, all of these generations, that he could value a girl. He managed to have that girl for one day. He carried her home, and I imagined him singing to her, holding her, and then he got in the house and his wife, my grandmother, just got so angry and chased him out of the house. And she got her boy baby back. But his love for girls, I can feel it to this day. And through all the anti-feminism and everything, there's my grandfather, loving girls.

Michael Solorio: Love that. He wasn't scared to go against the grain.

Maxine Hong Kingston: No.

Dr. Laura Dominguez: There's these unanswered questions, these mysteries, how much can you truly know them? So I wonder, can you reflect a bit on the difficulties you face in recovering information about your ancestors? What are those questions that you still have about their lives and the communities they belong to?

Michael Solorio: Research-wise, one of the hardest parts to keep learning more about Lim Lip Hong is because it's so hard to track his name. Because translating Chinese words, to write them down in English letters— They used to write down his name and the names of a lot of Chinese people, every time they write it down, the words would be different. The letters would be different. So it's really hard to look at documents and be like, okay, is this name the same name as this? Because the I is a Y. And also on top of that, Lim Lip Hong had nicknames, which would sometimes be written on documents too. I remember in his obituary when they put a little newspaper out that highlighted him, they put his name Tai Lim, which meant Big Lim, one of his nicknames. So yeah, that's an example. Even on official documents, they'd put a nickname instead and then it'd be written different every time. So it's hard to see which documents really represent him and a lot of extra effort needs to go into matching up the details of the story. I think that's the

biggest barrier. Of course, I would have loved to learn more about him, but it's just been so many generations. My grandma did a really good job of first synthesizing the stories. She told me that in the 70s, maybe the 80s, she used a voice recorder and asked all of her aunties and uncles to share what they know about Lim Lip Hong because she was a part of this Asian American theater group, and they wanted to make stories and scripts about things from their own culture and their own background, instead of just keep doing scripts about white people and Americans that they had been doing. Yeah, she did a good job synthesizing oral histories and I'm really grateful for that.

Maxine Hong Kingston: As far as I know, there is no documentation on my grandfather. He did not play a big role in the railroads. I'm sure he was a minor worker, not a leader of any kind. You know, we believe so much in documentation and we don't have documentation. The stories come out orally, which is a big part of passing on history. And the people who were oral storytellers were on my mother's side of the family. And my father's side, they were silent men. And my mother's side are like talkative women. So what I know about my grandfather, and the men in the family, comes through the eyes and the hearts of women. And a lot of times it's like that terrible guy, he went and got another wife—

Michael Solorio: [Laughs]

Maxine Hong Kingston: —and boy, he didn't bring up enough money. My aunt, she wrote letters to my great uncle, you know, "When are you coming back? I mean, you've had enough already of America." That's the documentation. "What are you doing over there? Come home. I haven't seen you for thirty years. Why don't you come home and die?" So that's what you get from the women. And from the men, it's like, well, he's not going to go home. Yeah, I would like to know some more from the point of view of those men. I make it up, but it's sort of, it's fiction. But it would be nice to hear the story from them, because, you know, what I get from that grandfather on the railroad... I don't know whether he even made it up about swinging in those baskets. Oh, for some years, there were some scholars who were trying to find some documentation that there were baskets. And I saw at the Crocker Museum in Sacramento, they have a diorama with life-sized men climbing into baskets. Did they make it up? Sue Fawn, did you ever find any evidence that there were baskets?

Dr. Sue Fawn Chung: Gordon Chang and his group of the Stanford Chinese Railroad Workers Project concluded after examining all the different controversies over baskets that there was some kind of basket used to lower the Chinese down. He believes that that really is the case. There were stories that it was a chair or that it was, you know, some other kind of vehicle lowering, but you had to lower the Chinese down somehow in order to insert the dynamite. And there are cases of Chinese lowering themselves in baskets in order to collect, for instance, bird's nests for the bird's nest soup. So there is some precedent to it, but we don't have any proof, but that's probably the most reliable. And with your testimony, I will cite that in my book, and say Maxine Hong said her grandfather did it.

Maxine Hong Kingston: I hear this via my mother, via my crazy grandfather.

Dr. Sue Fawn Chung: That's alright!

Maxine Hong Kingston: And, you know, both of them make up stuff.

All: [Laughs]

Dr. Laura Dominguez: My last question goes to all three of you, and that's this: what is it that you want future generations of Americans to know about the history and legacy of Chinese railroad workers?

Dr. Sue Fawn Chung: Well, I'll start, because I think that one of the things that has made me very sad in doing this research is that they were never acknowledged or given credit for building this railroad, which was so important to the development of America in more ways than you can imagine. And for America to receive and understand ideas about China and Asia even in general. So I think that what has happened recently has been a great boon to our understanding of world history, international history, migration history, and our own American history.

Michael Solorio: Yeah, I agree similarly. I'm grateful that finally now more people are learning about Chinese railroad workers. I remember at first there would just be a few paragraphs in my history textbook that we would sometimes go over in history class, but now there are more events to honor and celebrate the Chinese railroad workers. There was— In San Francisco Chinatown last year, I went to one with my grandma that was really nice that opened up the museum for the Chinese railroad workers. I'm grateful that the message is coming out more that Chinese railroad workers, that Chinese immigrants, really helped create the foundation of the United States in terms of creating the Transcontinental Railroad. And, like I mentioned earlier, connecting the heart of the country, creating the arteries and the veins. And that immigrants, like the Chinese railroad worker and immigrants from a bunch of different countries, have really done so much for the country. They've helped build the country, and I believe that they deserve dignity and respect. I wish people would recognize this and notice this, and then push forward the movement that today's immigrants, that the immigrants of today, should be more honored, more respected because they're doing the hard work of building buildings, of making sure that the food comes from the farm to us. They do so many essential duties and they should be respected. I really want the cycles of immigrant mistreatment, of immigrant discrimination to end because they've been going on since our ancestors have endured it. I want to see it decrease and ultimately come to an end. Immigrants do so much and they deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.

Maxine Hong Kingston: That's very beautiful. You're talking about our ancestors as building a foundation and they are the arteries of America. Our ancestors are the ancestors of America! I feel that way too, that we, or our ancestors, brought America back together again. The U.S. just had a Civil War. The country was torn apart, and right at the end of the war, there was the beginning of the Transcontinental Railroad. So there is this pulling the country together again. I wrote about that, and so I'm just going to read this paragraph from *China Men*.

Maxine Hong Kingston: "Some China Men follow the North Star in the constellation Tortoise the Black Warrior to Canada or they kept the constellation Phoenix ahead of them to South America or the White Tiger west or the Wolf east. Seventy lucky men rode the Union Pacific to Massachusetts for jobs at a shoe factory. Fifteen hundred went to Fou Loy Company in New Orleans and San Francisco, several hundred to plantations in Mississippi, Georgia, and Arkansas, and sugar cane plantations in Louisiana and Cuba. (From the South, they sent word that it was a custom to step off the sidewalk along with the black demons when a white demon walked by.) Seventy went to New Orleans to grade a route for a railroad, then to Pennsylvania to work in a knife factory. The Colorado State Legislature passed a resolution welcoming the railroad China Men to come build the new state. They built railroads in every part of the country—the Alabama and Chattanooga Railroad, the Houston and Texas Railroad, the Southern Pacific, the railroads in Louisiana and Boston, the Pacific Northwest, and Alaska. After the Civil War, China men banded the nation, North and South, East and West, with criss-crossing steel. They were binding and building ancestors of this place."

Maxine Hong Kingston: What I mean is that we Americans have Chinese ancestors. And these people, they are not called Americans. They are called illegal aliens, but I am claiming their

Americanhood. And let them claim it too, because they binded this broken country back together again.

Dr. Laura Dominguez: That's a really wonderful place for us to come to a close, and I just want to thank each of you for trusting us, for sharing your stories. It's been a real pleasure to learn from all of you. Thank you.